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Architecture as a control device

Disciplinary strategies on architecture as a post-Enlightenment tendency

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Synopsis

The turn between the 18th and the 19th century involved a lot of changes in Europe in the social, cultural and intellectual spheres of society. During this period a whole new group of strategies were applied in order to fight against ignorance and superstition through knowledge and science.

In this moment, and because positivism was also applied to buildings and cities, architecture is established as the main device that ensures full social control, substituting the open spaces where public punishments were displayed during previous centuries. These rituals were not considered necessary anymore, and institutions based in the use of discipline intensified their activity.

These institutions pretended to control people by building knowledge on them. Typologies like prisons, schools or hospitals appeared then, and, even though they have different purposes, they all shared the same strategies.

So, can architecture and the city be understood as devices used to ensure social control?

Key words: Architecture, knowledge, surveillance, factories, prisons.

1. The Enlightenment as a starting point

During the 17th and the 18th centuries, the concept of the body as a target for power relationships was generalized. Previously, the main ways to keep social control were both public punishments and tortures, but the new cultural environment changed that procedures. Since then, bodies won't be punished and tortured but manipulated, taught and prepared so they would act and perform as desired by the ruling classes. These ideas were previously stated by authors like Descartes or La Mettrie, but it is in this precise moment when their application is widespread. As Michel Foucault stated in his work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, the disciplines emerge as general and systematic expressions of dominance over population during the Enlightenment.

2. The techniques

As any other strategy, disciplines are based on a group of techniques that in this case pretend to control individuals. One of them is the possibility of enclosing people, that appeared before the Enlightenment in institutions like monasteries or in elements such as the exterior walls of medieval cities, but since the 18th century is applied in many other typologies such as factories or schools.

Once we approach to these enclosing systems, we can observe that they don't work following a rigid principle, neither constant, but they design the space in a delicate and flexible way. It is pretended to create analytical spaces where bodies are visible, so their actions can be surveilled in order to correct them. To achieve that goals, space is divided in different areas depending on the different activities that are going to take place. That is a way to start individualizing people, so their abilities and performances can be compared and rated, and eventually corrected, so they can optimize a production that can be material (factories) or intellectual (schools).

All these strategies grouped under concepts such as the cell, define complex architectural spaces whose physical appearance is the mere representation of these ideas. Their design is not determined by beauty but by relational complex systems that guarantee the obedience of individuals and optimal production and that are external to simple building activities. In these architectures, gesture control is also important in the establishment of routines and the organization of heterogeneous groups of people, being key in the creation of "microphysics of power" based on cellular coercion.

3. Time politics

The use of time is another way to guarantee control over individuals. It first appeared in the coenobitic monasticism, where life was organized through time, with a strict control where even the smaller detail is completely determined. This model looks for a perfect correspondence between time and space, where every room has a precise activity and a precise moment to be done. Time and space work together looking for rituals that make easier to control what is happening, as it was done in the Abbey of Saint Gall. (Fig. 1).

In addition, its design also responds to other strategies that are repeated in different buildings of control, like the central position of the cloister as an observation space, with the cells around. These principles can be found as well in later institutions because they constitute the ideological basis for modern means of production that appeared through the 18th century. This time control is extended later to other architecture devices using the same procedures: spaces that guarantee rhythms, repetition and the imposition of tasks. We can assure that this time-space relation also affects bodies, enabling the possibility of controlling not just what is happening in each space, but the gestures and movements that are performed in them.

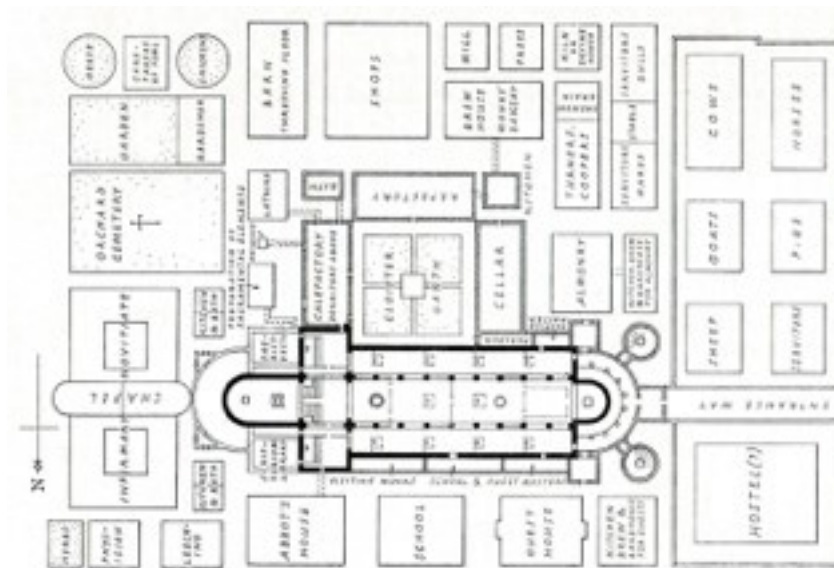


Figure 1. St. Gall Floor Plan as an example of Spatial Timelines.

4. Cities and surveillance

In the same way that buildings were used as devices intended to build knowledge on people by observing them, the design of cities is also intended to work in the same direction. Some of the strategies stated by Foucault can be also found in urban design where they help to ensure normalization and hierarchized surveillance. Disciplinary institutions are in fact coercive devices that control by looking at people. Even if hospitals, schools or factories are good examples, the military camp is the best. The organization in perfect squares allows the complete visibility and dominance over the organization.

With an origin on these military systems, some of their principles were transferred to urban design, with examples such as the Haussmann plan for Paris, where new wide and open public spaces made easier to control the city and turn it more transparent, erasing the chaotic medieval spaces where riot were originated. As Jean Starobinski stated “with a mixture of monumentality and repressive purposes, destructions and reconstructions of *midcentury urban areas where one of the reasons for spleen*”¹. Other models, such as the concept of urbanization described by Ildefonso Cerdá, made it possible to understand

¹ STAROBINSKI, Jean, 1989. *La Mélancolie au Miroir, Trois lectures de Baudelaire*. Paris: Julliard.

the city as something that could be scientifically controlled and designed, so people could be distributed and observed as it was done in disciplinary institutions.

5. Architecture as a control device

The strategies studied in this article were both initiated and established as a way of ensuring social control during the change between the 17th and the 18th centuries, turning architecture into a required and decisive operator in this surveillance process.

Buildings as the Royal Saltworks at Arc-et-Senans, designed by Claude-Nicolas Ledoux are manifestations of the extension of the concept of surveillance towards architecture. Conceived as a complex that must reflect work hierarchy it is one of the different examples of circular surveillance architecture, as the Panopticon (Fig.2) designed by Jeremy Bentham or la Petite Roquette by Harou Romain (Fig.3).

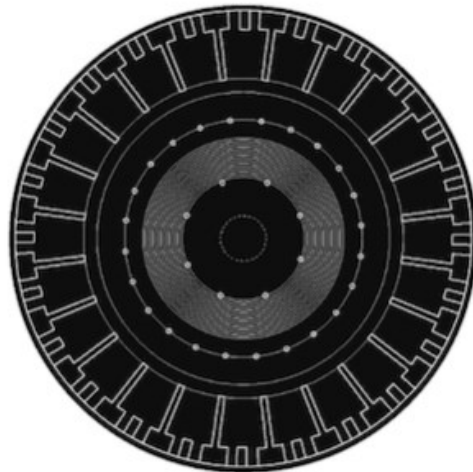


Figure 2. CARRASCO HIDALGO, Alejandro. Jeremy Bentham Panopticon Plan.

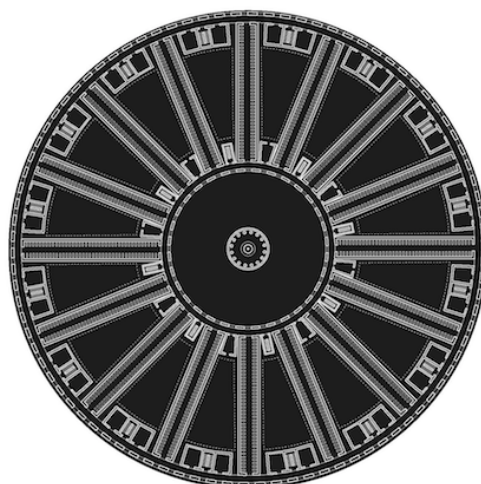


Figure 3. CARRASCO HIDALGO, Alejandro. La Petite Roquette Plan.

However, this way of controlling through architecture is still present, even if it isn't looking just for control but for any profit. The main strategies that were described previously (cells, the possibility of enclosing, time-space correspondence and the principles of visibility) can be found in almost every building that exists today. If we look, for example, at the plan of the Panopticon, and we compare it to Alvar Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium (fig.4) or Terragni Sant' Elia School (fig.5) we can see in all of them cells, common spaces that are part of a time-space routine and mechanisms of spatial individualization and observance, even if they have different goals. Architecture has stablished itself as a device committed to controlling in order to produce, repeating and appropriating those strategies that were initially extended during the Enlightenment.

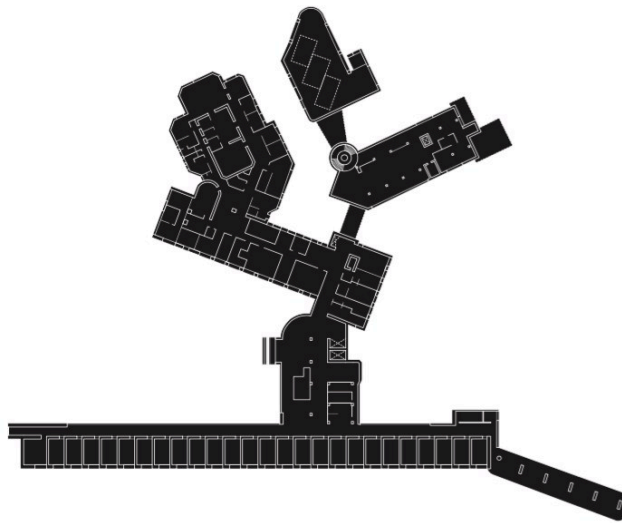


Figure 4. CARRASCO HIDALGO, Alejandro. Paimio Sanatorium Plan.

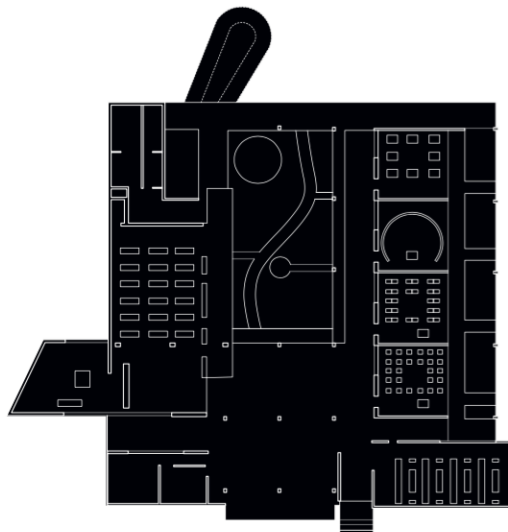


Figure 5. CARRASCO HIDALGO, Alejandro. Sant'Elia School Plan.

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Biography

Alejandro Carrasco Hidalgo. (1993) is a MArch student at Universidad de Alcalá, where he obtained his bachelor's degree (2017) with his thesis Punish and Surveillance: a (re)vision on observance, control and discipline devices. With international experience in offices such as BIG (Bjarke Ingels Group) or Barbas Lopes Arquitectos, he is launching his own editorial project, Momentum which has been selected to be part of the Spanish Pavilion at Venice Biennale 2018.